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Event Management and Leadership through Youth-led Initiatives: A Case Study of TEDxThaltej Youth

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Abstract

Youth-led initiatives play a pivotal role in fostering leadership, innovation, and community engagement. This study presents a detailed case analysis of TEDxThaltej Youth 2025, an independently organized TEDx event in Ahmedabad, India, examining how a youth-driven team manages complex event operations while upholding professionalism, ethical standards, and sustainability. Through structured leadership, cross-departmental collaboration, and digital innovation, the organizing team addressed challenges such as operational disengagement, speaker withdrawal, and communication gaps. Compliance with ISO 9001:2015, ISO 20121:2024, and the Nirmaya Foundation Green Standard (NFGS) provided frameworks for quality management, sustainable practices, and ethical governance. The study highlights actionable insights for emerging youth-led initiatives, emphasizing the importance of formalized documentation, transparent decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. Recommendations and future directions underscore the potential for scalable, sustainable, and ethically grounded models in youth-led-event-management.

Keywords

Youth-led initiatives, Event management, Leadership, TEDx, ISO 9001:2015, ISO 20121:2024, Sustainability, Ethical governance, Digital innovation, Ahmedabad

1. Introduction

Youth-led initiatives have increasingly become a significant driver of innovation, leadership development, and social engagement, particularly in the domains of education, community service, and event management. Among these, TEDx events have emerged as globally recognized platforms that enable young individuals to conceptualize, organize, and execute large-scale events, while fostering the dissemination of transformative ideas. TEDxThaltej Youth, an independently organized TEDx event licensed by TED, represents a paradigmatic

example of a youth-driven initiative that combines structured event management, ethical governance, and sustainability to deliver high-impact experiences for its audience.

The 2025 edition of TEDxThaltej Youth was not only a stage for thought-provoking speakers but also a living laboratory for youth-driven organizational leadership. From the initial speaker application cycles to the culmination of the live event, the team prioritized transparent decision-making, accountability, and ethical practices. Operational challenges, such as volunteer disengagement, speaker withdrawal, and communication gaps, were addressed systematically through formal incident reporting, structured team restructuring, and adherence to internationally recognized standards. Compliance with ISO 9001:2015 (Quality Management System), ISO 20121:2024 (Sustainable Event Management), and the Nirmaya Foundation Green Standard (NFGS) ensured that every stage of event planning, from internal coordination to public communication, was documented, monitored, and continuously improved.

This research provides a comprehensive case study of TEDxThaltej Youth 2025, examining how youth-led teams can manage complex, multi-stakeholder events while maintaining professionalism, ethical integrity, and sustainable operational practices. Specifically, the study explores:

1. **Leadership Structures:** The establishment of formal roles, delegated responsibilities, and decision-making hierarchies to maintain operational continuity.

2. **Operational Management:** Strategies for workflow optimization, digital documentation, risk mitigation, and cross-departmental coordination.

3. **Ethical and Sustainable Practices:** Implementation of transparent policies, stakeholder communication, and environmentally conscious measures, including paperless operations and digital ticketing.

4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Mechanisms to manage relationships with speakers, volunteers, attendees, and the broader community.

By documenting the challenges, interventions, and outcomes of TEDxThaltej Youth, this study highlights practical insights and strategies for scholars, event managers, and young leaders aiming to design impactful, sustainable, and ethically grounded initiatives. The findings underscore that age and formal experience are not constraints to professional-level event management when structured systems, ethical decision-making, and innovative digital solutions are in place.

The scope of this research extends beyond descriptive analysis; it seeks to provide a framework for replication, demonstrating how youth-led teams can align leadership, operations, and sustainability goals in the successful execution of complex events. This makes the study relevant

not only for academic audiences but also for practitioners, policymakers, and educational institutions promoting youth leadership programs.

2. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the planning, execution, and leadership processes of TEDxThaltej Youth 2025. The research is grounded in firsthand documentation, including internal audit reports, press releases, operational notices, and digital communication logs, providing a comprehensive view of the event's organizational dynamics.

2.1 Data Collection

Primary data were collected from:

- **Internal Audit Reports** (ISO 9001:2015, ISO 20121:2024, NFGS) documenting weekly operations, compliance, and sustainability practices.
- **Press Releases and Public Notices** issued to update stakeholders about speaker lineups, venue changes, and policy updates.
- **Digital Communication Logs**, including official emails, WhatsApp Business messages, and Google Drive records, detailing decision-making, task assignment, and accountability measures.
- **Event Management Records**, such as application forms, interview evaluations, and feedback reports of speaker selection processes.

Secondary data were collected from:

- Relevant TEDx guidelines and standards for event management.
- Literature on youth-led leadership, sustainable event management, and ethical organizational practices.

2.2 Research Framework

The study examines TEDxThaltej Youth operations through **three analytical lenses**:

1. **Leadership and Governance:** Analysis of team structuring, delegation of responsibilities, and conflict resolution.

2. **Operational Management:** Review of workflows, task assignments, compliance adherence, and problem-solving mechanisms.

3. **Sustainability and Ethics:** Evaluation of environmental, social, and ethical practices, including digital documentation, audience engagement, and stakeholder communication.

2.3 Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using a **content analysis approach**, identifying patterns in leadership decisions, operational efficiency, and compliance adherence. Cross-referencing between ISO/NFGS audit reports and public documentation helped validate the integrity of actions and highlight best practices. Key events, such as speaker withdrawals or operational restructuring, were treated as **critical incidents** to examine decision-making processes and their outcomes.

This methodology ensures that the study provides a **holistic understanding of youth-led event management**, combining empirical evidence with qualitative insights into leadership, ethical decision-making, and sustainable practices.

3. Results and Discussion

The case study of TEDxThaltej Youth 2025 reveals the dynamics of **youth-led event management**, illustrating how young organizers navigate leadership, operational challenges, ethical dilemmas, and sustainability requirements in a high-stakes, professional environment. Drawing from internal documentation, audit reports, press releases, and digital workflows, the findings are presented across three thematic dimensions: leadership and governance, operational management, and sustainability and ethics.

3.1 Leadership and Governance

TEDxThaltej Youth exemplifies a **distributed and adaptive leadership model**, where authority is structured yet responsive to real-time challenges.

- **Hierarchical Clarity and Empowerment:** The operations team experienced disengagement and non-compliance, prompting the submission of two formal Incident Reports (TEDXTY-IR-OPS-001 and 002). This led to the appointment of Ms. Kaneesha Shah as Deputy Director of Operations (TEDXTY-ON-OPS-001). The restructuring ensured clear delegation of responsibilities, empowered capable leaders, and reinforced accountability. This demonstrates how youth-led organizations can balance hierarchical clarity with empowerment, providing both guidance and autonomy.

- **Evidence-based Decision-Making:** Decisions regarding the speaker lineup, including the withdrawal of Ms. Krupa Nishar, were executed through structured review, voting, and documentation. This process ensured transparency and adherence to **internal standards** and global TEDx principles, reflecting that even youth-run initiatives can maintain formal governance frameworks comparable to professional organizations.

- **Conflict Mitigation and Communication:** The leadership prioritized **open and traceable communication**, issuing formal notices and press releases (TEDXTY-NT-002, Press Release 4). This helped prevent informal disputes, ensured alignment with organizational policies, and maintained stakeholder trust. Importantly, all communication was digital, documented, and centrally archived, demonstrating **accountability and audit-readiness**.

Implications: Effective leadership in youth-led initiatives requires combining **adaptive decision-making, role clarity, empowerment, and procedural transparency**. The TEDxThaltej Youth model indicates that young leaders can develop professional governance capabilities even in volunteer-driven settings.

3.2 Operational Management

Operational efficiency was critical to delivering a high-quality TEDx event under volunteer-led circumstances. Key operational strategies included:

- **Structured Workflow Systems:** The event relied heavily on digital tools to manage applications, attendance, and communication. Google Forms and Drive folders were used for applications, internal notices, and document archiving. Weekly follow-up reports ensured accountability, while the "Live" feature on the website allowed instant updates of blog posts, notifications, and press releases. These measures **minimized errors, improved responsiveness, and enhanced transparency**.

- **Risk Identification and Corrective Measures:** The audit reports highlighted operational breakdowns, such as delayed responsiveness by speakers or disengagement by volunteers. These issues were addressed through formal warnings, restructuring, and role reassignments, demonstrating **proactive risk management**. For instance, the formal documentation of incidents and restructuring orders ensured that all decisions were traceable and defensible.

- **Time and Resource Management:** The organizers effectively coordinated multiple teams—Operations, Speaker Support, Press & Media—without compromising timelines. Digital documentation, cloud-based storage, and structured communication reduced

physical resource dependency and ensured **timely task completion**.

- **Stakeholder-Centric Approach:** Clear, public communication via press releases maintained trust among speakers, attendees, and collaborators. The transparency in addressing speaker changes ensured **minimal disruption to audience expectations** while maintaining ethical standards.

Implications: Youth-led initiatives can maintain operational excellence by combining **structured workflows, digital tools, risk mitigation strategies, and stakeholder-centric communication**, even in contexts with volunteer-driven teams.

3.3 Sustainability and Ethics

TEDxThaltej Youth illustrates how **ethical frameworks and sustainable practices** can be embedded in youth-led event management.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** The event implemented paperless workflows, QR-based event schedules, and e-tickets instead of printed ID cards. These practices reduced the carbon footprint, demonstrating that youth-led events can **integrate environmentally conscious practices without compromising quality or accessibility**.

- **Ethical Governance and Fairness:** Speaker removal decisions were executed with professionalism and emotional sensitivity, ensuring no public shaming or bias. Policies such as blacklisting applicants who expressed formal disinterest were clearly communicated through press releases, establishing **transparent boundaries and respect for all stakeholders**.

- **Compliance with Standards:** Operations adhered to ISO 9001:2015 (Quality Management), ISO 20121:2024 (Sustainable Event Management), and NFGS (Ethical Governance), illustrating how youth-led events can meet **formalized quality, sustainability, and ethical standards**.

- **Emotional and Social Responsibility:** Beyond environmental and procedural standards, organizers actively managed **emotional well-being** of both speakers and volunteers, ensuring empathetic engagement and supportive work culture, which is a crucial component of sustainable event management.

Implications: Ethical and sustainable practices are not limited to institutional frameworks; youth-led initiatives can integrate these values into their operations through **digital solutions, procedural fairness, environmental consciousness, and stakeholder empathy**.

3.4 Synthesis and Key Insights

The TEDxThaltej Youth case demonstrates that:

1. **Youth-led teams can exhibit professional governance** comparable to formal organizations.
2. **Digital-first operational systems** enhance accountability, traceability, and efficiency.
3. **Structured leadership and distributed responsibilities** allow agile yet disciplined decision-making.
4. **Sustainability and ethics** can coexist with high-impact event delivery.
5. **Documentation and transparency** are key enablers for audit-readiness, public trust, and volunteer satisfaction.

This analysis confirms that youth-led initiatives, when structured, documented, and ethically guided, can **deliver complex events with high standards of professionalism, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement**.

4. Conclusion

The case study of TEDxThaltej Youth 2025 provides compelling evidence that **youth-led initiatives can successfully manage complex, high-stakes events** when structured systems, ethical governance, and sustainability frameworks are embedded into the operational model. The findings of this research highlight several critical conclusions regarding leadership, operational management, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement.

4.1 Leadership and Organizational Insights

The TEDxThaltej Youth experience demonstrates that **youth leadership can be professional, adaptive, and evidence-driven**. The appointment of a Deputy Director of Operations (Ms. Kaneesha Shah) during a period of operational disengagement reflects a **proactive approach to leadership gaps**, ensuring role clarity and accountability. Decision-making was consistently **transparent, structured, and democratic**, as evidenced by incident reports, voting, and formal documentation processes.

Key insights include:

- **Empowered Hierarchies:** Delegating authority to capable team members while maintaining oversight allows young leaders to manage multiple departments without

overwhelming centralized control.

- **Adaptive Problem Solving:** Challenges, such as disengagement of volunteers or misalignment of speaker expectations, were addressed in real-time with structured corrective actions, demonstrating the **capacity for rapid organizational adaptation**.

- **Ethical Decision-Making:** All major decisions, including speaker withdrawals and team restructuring, were guided by fairness, transparency, and adherence to internal policies, proving that **ethical leadership is achievable even in volunteer-driven youth organizations**.

4.2 Operational Management Insights

Operational efficiency in TEDxThaltej Youth was achieved through **digital-first strategies, structured workflows, and proactive risk management**.

- **Structured Workflows:** Systems such as Google Forms, cloud-based document repositories, and version-controlled internal communications ensured that all tasks were tracked, deadlines were met, and accountability was maintained across multiple departments.

- **Risk Mitigation:** Incident reports and corrective measures were formally documented, allowing for transparent resolution of internal conflicts and deviations from operational expectations.

- **Time and Resource Efficiency:** The reliance on digital tools minimized logistical challenges, reduced physical resource consumption, and allowed real-time updates through live web pages and press releases.

- **Stakeholder-Centric Communication:** The use of official press releases, email-only communications, and clear policy statements ensured that external stakeholders—including speakers, attendees, and collaborators—remained informed, aligned, and confident in the event's management.

These findings suggest that **well-structured operational systems, when paired with proactive leadership, allow youth-led teams to deliver large-scale events with precision, transparency, and professionalism**.

4.3 Sustainability and Ethical Governance Insights

The TEDxThaltej Youth model demonstrates that **sustainability and ethics can be embedded into all aspects of event management**, even in resource-constrained, volunteer-led contexts.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** The event's adoption of paperless workflows, QR-coded schedules, and digital e-tickets illustrates a commitment to **reducing environmental impact** without compromising accessibility or participant experience.

- **Ethical Governance:** Decisions regarding speakers and team members were carried out with **empathy, fairness, and procedural transparency**, ensuring no public defamation or misrepresentation.

- **Social and Emotional Responsibility:** Internal compliance policies, careful communication, and supportive team practices reinforced **psychological safety and team morale**, which are critical yet often overlooked components of sustainable event management.

The research underscores that **ethical and sustainable practices are not exclusive to large institutions**; rather, they can be effectively integrated into youth-led initiatives through structured planning, clear policies, and intentional communication.

4.4 Lessons Learned and Best Practices

From the detailed analysis of TEDxThaltej Youth, several **best practices emerge** for youth-led initiatives seeking to organize professional events:

1. **Document Everything:** From incident reports to press releases, meticulous record-keeping ensures accountability, traceability, and audit readiness.

2. **Define Clear Roles and Responsibilities:** Leadership hierarchies must be clearly communicated, with backup systems to maintain continuity during crises.

3. **Prioritize Ethical and Transparent Decision-Making:** Decisions must be evidence-based, documented, and communicated with fairness to all stakeholders.

4. **Leverage Digital Tools:** Cloud storage, version-controlled documents, live web updates, and automated communications reduce errors and enhance operational efficiency.

5. **Integrate Sustainability Practices:** Paperless workflows, QR codes, and e-tickets reduce environmental impact while modernizing event logistics.

6. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Transparent communication, formal notices, and public updates maintain trust among speakers, volunteers, and attendees.

7. **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional support and respect for volunteers and participants improve morale, reduce friction, and strengthen organizational culture.

4.5 Recommendations for Future Youth-Led Initiatives

Based on the case study findings, the following recommendations can guide future youth-led events:

- Implement **structured, documented operational frameworks** early to prevent chaos and ensure smooth task delegation.
- Maintain a **distributed leadership model**, empowering capable team members while retaining centralized oversight for critical decisions.
- Establish **formal communication protocols** to prevent informal conflicts and miscommunications.
- Embed **sustainability and ethical practices** into all operational and strategic decisions.
- Conduct **regular internal audits and feedback loops** to identify gaps in performance, compliance, or team engagement.
- Invest in **digital-first solutions** for workflow, documentation, and stakeholder communication.
- Ensure **emotional well-being and team morale** are prioritized alongside task completion and operational efficiency.

Conclusion Statement:

TEDxThaltej Youth 2025 demonstrates that **youth-led initiatives can achieve professional-level governance, operational efficiency, and sustainability**, even in volunteer-driven contexts. By combining structured leadership, ethical frameworks, and innovative digital workflows, young organizers can deliver complex events that are not only impactful but also aligned with global standards of quality, ethics, and sustainability. This case study provides a

replicable model for future youth-led projects, illustrating that age and experience are not barriers to high-quality event management when planning, transparency, and accountability are prioritized.

6. Recommendations and Future Directions

Based on the case study of TEDxThaltej Youth 2025, several key recommendations emerge for youth-led initiatives seeking to implement **professional, ethical, and sustainable event management practices**. These recommendations are informed by the operational challenges, interventions, and outcomes documented in this study.

6.1 Recommendations for Youth-Led Event Management

1. **Structured Leadership and Delegation**
    - Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and reporting hierarchies within the organizing team.
    - Empower deputies and core team members to make operational decisions during periods when the primary organizer may be unavailable, ensuring continuity.
    - Implement formal delegation protocols and maintain written documentation of decisions to enhance accountability.
2. **Operational Transparency and Documentation**
    - Maintain digital logs of meetings, correspondence, and internal notices for traceability and compliance.
    - Introduce standardized incident reporting systems to address disengagement, absenteeism, or performance gaps proactively.
    - Utilize project management tools (e.g., shared drives, workflow trackers) to centralize information and reduce miscommunication.
3. **Ethical Governance and Stakeholder Engagement**

- Adopt structured evaluation processes for speakers and volunteers, ensuring feedback is documented and communicated respectfully.
- Provide formal closure and recognition mechanisms when individuals withdraw or are removed, preserving dignity and emotional well-being.
- Develop clear policies for handling disputes, grievances, or disinterest, ensuring transparency and fairness.

4. **Sustainability Practices**
   - Continue minimizing paper usage through QR codes, e-tickets, and digital documentation.
   - Integrate sustainable logistics practices, including eco-friendly catering, waste management, and energy-efficient equipment.
   - Align event policies with recognized sustainability standards (e.g., ISO 20121, NFGS) to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders.
5. **Digital Communication and Public Transparency**
   - Limit informal or ad-hoc communication; maintain formal email channels and official press releases for public and stakeholder communication.
   - Establish a centralized digital repository for policies, updates, and announcements accessible to all team members.
   - Use social media and event platforms for real-time updates while maintaining professional and verified communication.

6.2 Future Directions for Research and Practice

1. **Comparative Studies of Youth-Led Initiatives**
   - Future research can examine multiple youth-led TEDx events or similar initiatives to compare leadership models, operational efficiency, and sustainability practices.

- Cross-case analyses may provide deeper insights into factors that contribute to long-term organizational resilience.

2. **Integration of Technology in Event Management**

    - Investigate the role of advanced project management, AI-based scheduling, and virtual collaboration tools in enhancing operational efficiency for youth-led teams.

    - Explore digital audience engagement strategies to increase inclusivity and participation while maintaining ethical standards.

3. **Longitudinal Impact Assessment**

    - Conduct longitudinal studies to measure the impact of youth-led events on participants' leadership development, community engagement, and social responsibility.

    - Assess how structured interventions, like formal governance and sustainability practices, affect the long-term credibility and influence of youth-led initiatives.

4. **Policy and Training Recommendations**

    - Develop comprehensive training modules for young organizers in ethics, sustainability, and operational excellence.

    - Advocate for institutional support, mentorship, and resource-sharing frameworks to strengthen youth-led projects.

By implementing these recommendations and exploring future research directions, youth-led initiatives such as TEDxThaltej Youth can **enhance organizational maturity, stakeholder trust, and sustainable impact**, serving as scalable models for other emerging youth-driven projects globally.

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